



SUBMITTED PHOTO

MOTHER AND SON

Eight-year-old Coletan Ritmanich gets a big hug from his mother, Kimberly, a member of the 106th Maintenance Battalion of the Mississippi Army National Guard based at Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg. Here is Coletan's message to his mom: "I want everyone to know that Sgt. Kimberly Ritmanich is a very special Mom. When she is at home, we do everything together. She is smart and very funny. I'm so very proud of my Mom. I say a prayer for her every night. I want everyone to know I love her bigger than the sky. I will pray for her year in Iraq to pass fast, so she can be home with me."

Read Jarrod Moulds' story,
"That sweet sound,"
in the Homes section of
"Profile 2005:
A Letter from Home."



Moulds

Lamar students: 'In honor we salute you'

Amy Barnett is a staff writer for *The Skyline*, a bi-weekly newspaper published by Naval Air Station Meridian. Her story is about the unveiling May 19 of a mural created by Lamar School elementary students.

"I am an Army brat and grew up across the United States. My dad was career Army and was a public affairs officer at one point in his career," Amy said.

"Seeing him reporting the news from Somalia is what made me want to become a journalist ... I enjoy the military lifestyle, I really don't know any different since I was raised that way."

Amy married a Marine, which brought her to Meridian. Her husband, Mike, is going through flight school and will be winged in March.

"The story I wrote about Lamar Elementary came close to home for me. When I was in the eighth grade, my father was stationed in Somalia for a year. Even though it was never declared a war, it sure felt like one for us at home," Amy said.

"Seeing those kids demonstrate such love for their country and being so proud of their parents serving brought back so many memories."

By Amy Barnett
special to The Star

How do you honor a hero? If you leave it up to the elementary students at Lamar School in Meridian, it's simple.

You take lessons learned in history class, add in an amazing art project and dedicated students — and you have the makings of a traveling tribute to our heroes: "In Honor We Salute You."

Jan Trest, an art instructor at Lamar and students from kindergarten through fifth grade started a wall mural to honor all those who have served or are currently serving in the armed forces.

"We do community projects every year and we wanted to do something to honor the military," Trest said.

There are three, 5-foot by 4-foot interlocking panels that are covered with scenes like the Marines raising the flag at Iwo Jima, planes dropping bombs, soldiers hunkering down in the trenches and dog-fighting jets. There is even a silhouette of a soldier playing the bugle at a graveside.

In the middle of all this action stands a



PHOTO BY AMY BARNETT / NAS MERIDIAN

HARD WORK

Austin Kimbrell, a fifth-grade student at Lamar School in Meridian, checks out a patriotic mural he and his classmates created to honor military service.

large oak tree with yellow and red ribbons hanging from its branches. The yellow ribbons remind us to remember our troops, and the red ribbons signify the bloodshed.

Along the edges are photographs donated by the students and the community, some dating back to the Civil War.

"We had so much support from the community," Trest said.

"There were so many stories and photographs that were donated, we had to make two scrapbooks to accompany the mural everywhere it travels."

Austin Kimbrell and Logan Knight, fifth-graders, were among the many that donated photographs.

"My dad is in the Air National Guard and was able to come today," Knight said at the unveiling. "He was serving in Iraq and has to go back later this summer."

Kimbrell's father couldn't make it. "My dad is still overseas and knows about the project," Kimbrell said. "My mom and grandma were here today taking

pictures so we can send them to him."

The pride and honor of this project was not only felt by these two students — but by the many sailors, soldiers and Marines who were asked to sign the mural.

"It is awesome. The work they put into it means a lot," said Personnelman/Petty Officer 1st Class Jesus Ortega. "It is also very motivating to see this and know how much they care."

All military members past and present were able to come up on stage and look at the mural and sign it.

"It is an honor for us to have them here and it's a chance for us to recognize them," Trest said. "I hope that the kids learned respect for our country and for all the men and women past and present and what they have done for our great country."

How do you honor a hero?
If you ask Austin Kimbrell, the answer is to become one: "When I grow up I want to join the military so I can defend our country."

The ride of a lifetime

Michele Robinson has lived in Chunky most of her life. She is married to Technical Sgt. Ronnie Robinson of the Mississippi Air National Guard's 186th Air Refueling Wing. The couple has two children, Melissa, 17, and Tyler, 13.

A fifth-grade teacher at Newton County Elementary School, Michele says a "spouse orientation flight" last year onboard a KC-135 gave her a better idea what her husband's Guard service is all about.

By Michele Robinson
special to The Star

In August 2004, I experienced something that I've never experienced before, my first flight in an aircraft — and it surpassed all my expectations.

I had no intentions of flying anytime soon until I got a call from Connie Myers, a civilian employee of the Mississippi Air National Guard in Meridian, asking me if I would like to go on a "spouse orientation flight."

I thought, "Sure, that would be great," but I had no idea what an adventure was in store. Not only was this my first flight but, when I arrived, I found out that Congressman Chip Pickering would be joining us.

I thought I would be very nervous, but the crew made me feel as safe as if I were riding in a

car. They were so nice and eager to share their knowledge of flying and refueling with all of us.

My husband has always talked about how beautiful the sky is from airplane, but I had no idea. The clouds looked like puffy marshmallow mountains to me, but even the beauty of the sky was not the most amazing thing.

I was in awe when I saw that F-15 pull up beside us. When I was able to watch from the boom pod while the F-15 was being refueled I felt speechless — and that is major for me! On our flight back, I had the opportunity to sit in the cockpit and listen as the pilots communicated with air traffic control.

As the daughter of a Marine Vietnam veteran/Air National Guardsman and the wife of a Meridian Air National Guardsman, I have always been very patriotic. However, watching those men perform their jobs instilled even more pride in me.

A simple thank-you does not express my gratitude for all that you do. I cannot put into words how awesome this flight experience was. Mrs. Yvette Wilkerson, wife of Staff Master Sgt. Doug Wilkerson, said it best: "The glow of Wal-Mart is gone."

And that pretty much summed it up for us girls. Thank you for a day I will never forget. You are all great.

Wish you could have been there

This letter is from Michael Sterling, a seventh-grader at Magnolia Middle School. He is writing to his cousin, Jacob Sterling, U.S. Army, who lives in Huntsville, Ala.

Dear Jacob,

Thank you for supporting the U.S. over there in Afghanistan. Everyone in Meridian missed you over Christmas. We all are praying for you. Even some people at our church are praying for you. We all hope you are coming home soon.

Stephanie, Uncle Gordon's dog, was very hyper over Christmas. Grandmother's cat didn't like it so well and got very angry at Stephanie. The cat even hissed at Stephanie. It was funny. You had to be there. We wish you could've been there.

I just wanted to thank you and all the other soldiers for doing what you all are doing. Everyone back home is supporting each and every one of the troops. Thank you for fighting for our country.

Michael Sterling



Sterling